TL2013

Background to the human rights situation in East Timor during 1994

This report aims to outline developments concerning the East Timor question during the period since the last United Nations Commission on Human Rights meeting in February 1994 so as to provide a context within which the information presented in reports from human rights organisations and in first-person accounts can be better understood.

Expanding Access

The commission in 1994 called upon Indonesia to continue the policy of expanding access to human rights and humanitarian organisations as well as international media. Let us look at the extent to which this access was conceded and the ensuing events.

Media access

April protests

On April 14, during a visit by 25 foreign journalists invited by the Indonesian Government, a group of 5 young Timorese staged a brief protest in front of the visitors' hotel in Dili, holding up a banner and calling for the release of Xanana Gusmao; this in spite of the security forces maintaining what the BBC correspondent described as "a tight grip on the city". A number of young people were later detained and in June three of them received 20-month prison sentences. The official Antara news agency later reported that Indonesian military authorities in East Timor had angrily criticised the journalists saying that some had treated their visit as an "investigation" trip and had strayed from the official agenda.

APEC in Indonesia, unrest in Dili

At the time of the APEC summit in Bogor, near Jakarta in November a considerable number of journalists were allowed to go to East Timor. Minister of Information Harkomo stated "There is no ban on foreign journalists" as long as they abide by the rules of the game, such as being in possession of the proper permit" (1). Thus some 30 members of the international press were present in Dili to witness, at first hand, the repression of young Timorese demonstrating to mark the anniversary of the Santa Cruz massacre on Nov 12 and the events on succeeding days when Hundreds of youths were involved in violent clashes with police and military and again on 28 when an apparently staged pro-integration demonstration led to more violence. There were widespread arrests and Amnesty International compiled a list of 125 Timorese detained in Dili and the vicinity between Nov. 12 to 14..This gave rise to considerable editorial comment including: ....

Human rights - centre stage

International opinion, focussed on the run-up to the trade talks at the APEC summit, and on the hunger strike by 29 Timorese students in the US Embassy in Jakarta, was deeply perturbed at the developments in Dili. Political and human rights concerns, often thrust aside by the region's governments as their young economies boom, were brought on to centre stage: President Clinton raised the issue of human rights and East Timor "in firm and forceful terms" in his talks with President Suharto during the summit (2); former US president George Bush, and a longtime supporter of Suharto's government, expressed concern about the lack of progress on human rights in territory (3). On Nov. 17 the European Parliament passed a resolution referring to "the violent repression by the Indonesian army of occupation against Timorese demonstrators who, in Dili, were marking the anniversary of the Santa Cruz massacre and fighting for self-determination and for human rights".
Along with solidarity demonstrations in the US, UK and Australia, young East Timorese staged a protest at the Indonesian embassy in Spain and there was a demonstration by Korean human rights at the Indonesian embassy in Seoul, South Korea. Ramos-Horta of the CNRM as well as NGOs in the UK and Portugal appealed for a permanent UN presence in the territory.

Press expulsions

Meanwhile there was an immediate tightening of restrictions on journalists in East Timor:
- five journalists were expelled, including representatives of Reuter and Associated Press AP 21 Nov. - reporters were required to obtain written permits limited to two days. (4)
- On Nov. 12 two US journalists, Nairn and Goodman survivors of the Santa Cruz massacre and allegedly removed from a government black-list were picked up as they were entering the territory from West Timor and held for 20 hours before

being sent back to Jakarta in spite of the fact that they claim they had been issued with the appropriate journalist visas. (5)
- The Jakarta Government accused journalists of inciting the demonstrators. (6)
- Two more journalists were expelled the following week (7)

"People on the outside are listening"

The fact that so many Timorese participated in these protests attests considerable courage and desperation on their part knowing what had occurred in Dili three years before in Nov 1991 and the hard-line stance taken by military chief Major Gen. Adang Ruchtiana who had on 14 Oct. rejected an earlier offer of a cease-fire by Resistance leader Konis Santana and spoken of the sending of "a battalion of special combat troops" to East Timor.(8). The demonstrators may also have been encouraged by the fact that within East Timor, there is now considerable awareness, gleaned through radio and clandestine channels, of the extent of international support. Bishop Belo, speaking before the November events, remarked on this change: "After the years of silence, we still can't quite believe it. The young are very aware of it. When foreign delegations come, young people take incredible risks; but now they know people on the outside are listening ..." (9)

Aftermath of the November protests

Arising from these events, 125 Timorese were detained Amnesty International Update Nov 24. Human rights organisations expressed concern that, based on the pattern of events documented in the territory in previous such situations, those involved in the demonstrations in Dili, as well as the 40 Timorese students picked up before they could get join their companions at the US Embassy in Jakarta, would be harshly dealt with as soon as the international media had left. Indeed on 8 Dec. the BBC reported that dozens of people arrested in Dili during the November disturbances had been subjected to severe ill-treatment and torture.

Newspaper targeted

On Dec. 7 pro-integration youths smashed up the office of Dili's sole newspaper and it was reported that the same group later beat up one of its reporters (10). Earlier in the same week, Col Kiki Syahnakri, an ABRI commander based in East Timor, threatened that if East Timorese participated in any more demonstrations "I will not hesitate to clean them out ['sikat'in Bahasa Indonesia]". (11)

The recurring "image problem"

The overall pattern may be seen as one of an attempt by Indonesia to permit control relaxation of restrictions on access to East Timor by international media and then when these lead to evidence of human rights violations being revealed, embarrassing to the Jakarta Government and indeed supporting the allegations made by human rights groups like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, Asia who are being denied entry to East Timor, the reaction tends to one of repression and restriction of access. It is reported that the Jakarta Government paid more than half a million dollars to a US public relations firm to draw up a strategy and prepare press-kits to get around its "image problem" in dealing with the press attention expected during the Jakarta summit. According to a leaked copy of the firm's report, it was anticipated that opening access to the media for the summit would probably lead to undesirable revelations and publicity but it was hoped that this could be successfully counter-balanced by vigourous promotion of more favourable news stories. (12)

Access for human rights organisations

Accused of making contacts abroad

In May Jose Neves, a theological student and said to be a leading figure in the pro-independence East Timorese underground, was arrested in an East Java post office, as he attempted to post information on human rights gathered during a recent trip to the territory, along with a letter from resistance leader Konis Santana to the international conference on East Timor in Manila. When his trial began in October he was accused of making contacts abroad to support rebellious acts against Indonesia and among the examples cited by his prosecution were letters to UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali and the Japanese Prime Minister Hosokawa.(13) His trial was then adjourned until after the APEC conference. When it was resumed in December no foreign journalists were present.

"Allow international monitoring" - Indonesian parliamentarians

In June the Jakarta Post reported that an Indonesian inter-parliamentary cooperation committee in a report, which was read by native Timorese legislator Salvador Ximenes Soares, had called on the government to respect human rights in East Timor and to allow international monitoring groups into the territory including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, Asia. (14).

Access for foreign delegations

Contradictory impressions from MPs visits

Japanese visitors restricted

An all-party delegation of Japanese MPs on visiting East Timor in August complained that, although they had been promised "absolute freedom", they were not allowed to visit places outside the capital or speak to people whose names they had submitted 6 months in advance. They heard that there had been a large number of detentions before their visit. Mr Tomiko Okazaki said "We think the military should be removed from East Timor as soon as possible" . At the APEC conference in November the Japanese PM, in a departure from previous policy of reticence in pressing fellow Asian countries on human rights issues, was reported to have told President Suharto that Indonesia's human rights record would be taken into account in Tokyo's next aid package. (15)

British impressed

A three-day visit by 6 British MPs in September praised Indonesia for its human rights record in East Timor. The leader of the visiting Anglo-Indonesian Parliamentary Group, Conservative MP Patrick Nicholls, said he was very impressed by the Indonesian Government's efforts to prevent a recurrence of the 1991 massacre in Dili and that human rights issues had improved considerably. Bishop Belo commented "That's false. What did Nicholls see? They had the military watching them all the time." No members of the main British opposition parties were included in the group and indeed Nicholl's comments were put in question by the Labour Shadow Foreign Secretary, Ann Clywd. (16)

Church visit cancelled

The long-expected visit by a delegation from the World Council of Churches at the invitation of the Indonesian Christian Churches and scheduled for the latter part of November, did not take place because the Jakarta Government refused to issue the promised entry visas.

Openness in other forums

Indonesian press: more openness on Timor and ... closure

Within Indonesia itself, a developing openness in press reporting on East Timor and other issues early in the year was followed by a clamp-down. On 31 March the weekly "Editor" carried a detailed account of research by Indonesian academic, and former winner of the President Suharto environmentalist of the year award, George Aditjondro into the environmental effects of the Indonesian presence in East Timor. Dr Aditjondro's studies had confirmed the worst case estimates that 10% of the population of East Timor (60,000) were killed or died from war related deprivations in the first two months after the invasion by Indonesian troops in October 1974. He also said he had the names of 271 people killed and 200 missing after the Santa Cruz massacre in November 1991 (the Indonesian Government inquiry claimed that 50 were killed and 57 went missing). The article suggested this data could provide input to the up-coming round of UN-sponsored Indonesian-Portuguese negotiations in May.

This was the first time such comments had been published in Indonesia attributed to a prominent Indonesian figure rather than anti-Indonesian foreigners. In the following months there was increasing pressure on Editor which culminated in its closure in June along with June along with Tempo (for which Aditjondro was a regular columnist) and Detik all of whom had been outspoken on Timor and internal corruption issues. Dr Aditjondro also suffered, his house was stoned by hooligans in March the day after a press conference at which he had spoken of his findings, and later in the year, in the run-up to the APEC summit, he was arrested and interrogated for 2 periods totalling 15 hours before being released. . He was again summoned for interrogation later on 28 Dec. a week after having testified for the defence in the trial of Jose Neves (see above). (17) Two academic colleagues who defended the publication of his work were threatened with dismissal.

No Asian NGO conferences, please

When it came to NGOs in other Asian countries organising conferences on the Timor question, the reaction from the Jakarta Government was unequivocal: both in the case of the Manila conference in May and another in Bangkok in July, it was reported to have put strong pressures on the respective governments of those two countries to stifle the conferences by not allowing international speakers into the country to participate. In the former case this resulted in Irish Nobel Peace Prize winner Mairead Maguire being denied entry in the Philippines and being sent back to Europe, Bishop Soma of Japan was allowed in only after the intervention of Archbishop Sin of Manila and the name of Madame Mitterand of France was also included on the blacklist of those who would not be permitted entry. In fact, both events went ahead as planned, despite some Timorese and international speakers being sent back, and the attempt to prevent the meetings taking place generated considerable adverse criticism in the international press as for example:

Indeed Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans, normally a staunch supporter of the Suharto regime was said to be "disappointed" by moves to stifle the conferences. (18)

Dialogue and confidence-building measures

Historic encounters

As a result of the UN-mediated talks between Portugal and Indonesia in May, two historic meetings later took place. Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas met officially for the first time representatives of the East Timorese resistance movement (Jose Ramos-Horta of the CNRM, Joao Carrascalao of the UDT and Jose Luis Guterres of Fretilin). The three Timorese are reported to have stressed at the meeting that they were only representives and that the leader of the resistance movement was Xanana Gusmao whom they consulted and for whose release from prison they appealed. (19) In the same week, Portuguese Foreign Minister had an official meeting with Francisco Lopes da Cruz, Indonesian ambassador on Timorese affairs.

"Reconciliation a weak philosophy"

A week earlier the second round of the "Reconciliation" meetings of "leaders of East Timorese society living abroad and from East Timor" had taken place in England between dismissed Fretilin leader Abilio Araujo and pro-integration Timorese led by Lopes da Cruz. A UN observer, Mr Tamrat Samuel, was also present at the meeting. Jose Ramos Horta and the other resistance representatives came out strongly against these meetings.

Both Bishop Belo and Xanana Gusmao also rejected the "reconciliation" meetings. In a prison encounter with two of the participants, Mr Gusmao commented on the notion of reconciliation between Timorese: "I think the philosophy is an extremely weak one. Reconciliation with whom? The problem is not one of reconciliation between Timorese ..." and he described the process of reconciliation meetings as "merely a political ploy" (20)
Bishop Belo in a letter to Abilio Araujo said that he would only be willing to participate in talks where "all the political and social sectors of the Timorese people, ... [including] Fretilin, the CNRM, UDT, the traditional leaders, students and those at university" were involved. He went on to ask "Why are Timorese on the outside in favour of reconciliation, when back here the people are still being subjected to all kinds of pressure; when Dili is gradually becoming a Javanese city; when waves of immigrants continue to arrive and occupy the fertile lands of the southern coast; when the young people involved in the 12 November [Santa Cruz massacre in 1991] are still being hunted down?" (21)

Indeed one of the participants, MP Salvador Ximenes, said he was in favour of the meeting being open to all Timorese sectors, including Bishop Belo and the representatives of the resistance movement. (22)

Suharto should do a de Klerk!

Referring to a mooted encounter between President Suharto and Abilio Araujo, Dr George Aditjondro commented that there would be no point in such a dialogue. "I think the only person the President should meet is Xanana Gusmao (...) I would like to call on the President to follow the magnanimous example of de Klerk in South Africa by freeing Xanana Gusmao who is recognized internationally as the leader of the East Timor movement." (23)

Xanana for immediate referendum

Xanana Gusmao is now said to be serving his 20-year prison sentence with relatively good living conditions, having his own cell in Cipinang prison, in marked contrast to his early days in the prison when he was subjected to routine harassment by other inmates, allegedly at the instigation of the prison authorities. He is reported to have refused offers of exile.
The imprisoned Timorese leader, who was awarded the Human Rights Award of the United Nations Association of Australia in November, has insisted in interviews and in various letters he has sent out that he sees UN mediation as the only way to resolve the question in the long term and that "I believe the best solution is for there to be an immediate referendum ... but knowing the limited conditions in which the Timor question is being negotiated, I would say that the peace plan of our resistance council, the CNRM, is the instrument which offers all guarantees to Indonesia for a solution acceptable to the international community." (24)

Bishop Belo, Nobel Peace Prize nominee, also put his weight behind the need for a referendum saying in a document issued by the Catholic Church in East Timor on July 31 "In this situation the Church's suggestion is to hold a REFERENDUM"
The Bishop has continued to speak out and let the outside world know about the everyday difficulties facing his flock "Its like war here ... and I try to be the voice of the voiceless." (25)

After a sacrilege incident involving Indonesian soldiers and another incident at Dili university involving insults to two nuns, had lead to peaceful protests involving 500 students which resulted in 16 injured youths, detentions and disappearances he was moved to say "Timor is like hell. Christians are constantly being arrested, beaten and intimidated by police" (25).

In October he denounced a program of forced sterilisation which was being systematically applied to Timorese women and had caused conflicts "not only in the capital but also in several other towns such as Viqueque and Suai" (25)

"An inspirational figure"

Irish Nobel Peace Prize winner, Mairead Maguire, in her letter to the Nobel Committee, nominating the Bishop for the prize on November 11, compared him to Luther King and Ghandi as "an inspirational figure who has spoken out courageously for truth and justice in spite of death threats". (26)

END NOTES

(1) Jakarta Post Oct 15
(2) Reuter Nov 16
(3) The Australian Nov 24
(4) VOA Nov 21
(5) BBC Nov. 13
(6) AP 21 Nov
(7) Reuter 1 Dec.
(8) UPI Oct 14
(9) John Pilger, New Statesman and Society, Nov 25.
(10) Reuter 8 Dec
(11) Jawa Pos 1 Dec
(12) Reuter Nov.13
(13) Kompas 14 Oct.
(14) AFP 15 June
(15) Shakai Shimpo Sep. 6; AFP Aug. 11; Reuter Nov. 14
(16) Indonesian Observer Sep 22; Guardian Nov. 4, 21, 23, 25
(17) Tapol Report 25 Oct; Tapol Report 23 Dec.
(18) Le Monde June 1; Matebian News, E-mail, reg. easttimor July 26
(19) IPS Oct 7.
(20) Publico June 9
(21) Publico May 12
(22) Kompas Nov. 5
(23) Sinar Nov. 19
(24) Jolliffe interview, Eastern Express Aug. 31
(25) Reuter July 20; South China Morning Post July 18; AFP Oct. 19

(26) Peace People News Release 11 Nov; Two planned ambush attempts were reported by a Polish journalist in Jornal de Noticias April 2.